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SUBJECT: ANGOLA HOSTS FIRST SAN CONFERENCE

¶1. (U) Summary: Representatives from San communities in Angola gathered with San representatives from other Southern African countries, NGOs, and government officials for the first Angolan San Conference on April 24th - 26th 2007. Not only did this represent the first time the Angolan San met with San people from Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa, it was also the first time the Angolan San came together to discuss the community's issues. Though no firm GRA commitments of assistance were made, the conference was a positive step towards creating public awareness and GRA support for the basic human rights of a marginalized, impoverished people. Above all, the conference was an invaluable opportunity to start a dialogue within the San community on development issues. End Summary.

Angolan San: Dreaming of a Better Life

¶2. (U) Representatives from the 3,500 San people in Angola, the provincial governments of Huila, Cunene, and Kuando Kubango, San communities from Namibia, Botswana and South Africa, and national and international NGOs met in Lubango, the capital of Huila Province, for the first-ever Angolan San Conference on April 24-26th, 2007. The conference was organized by the local NGO Christian Organization for Aid and Community Development, and financed by groups including Trocaire (the Irish-Catholic Charity and Development Organization), the Dutch Development Organization (SNV), the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA), and Terre des Hommes. The conference's first two days were solely for the tri-country San communities, and the third day was open to the public.

¶3. (U) The San opened the public conference with traditional song, dance and a chant of their manifesto: "We are all Angolans. We want the same rights as other Angolans. We have the will to work and the strength to cultivate our fields. We dream of a life without abuse. We want training and respect for our leaders and our communities. We want to be a part of Angola's future. We want schools, medical clinics and legal protection of our lands. We want fair wages for our labor and a good relationship with our Bantu neighbors. We want the same assistance that others receive!"

¶4. (U) Recommendations from the conference include the creation of a San Council and the development and training of San leaders to advocate for the community's issues, such as the key issues of land and water rights. Many San are now day laborers on the same communal, ancestral territory their ancestors once used for nomadic hunting and gathering. The 2004 Angolan land law allows for legal recognition and titling of communal land, but regulations for the law have never been published and titling procedures throughout the country are on hold. In a positive step, a San community in Huila received a provisional land use title and was presented

with the official documentation at the conference. However, while the land title grants permission for use, it does not convey ownership or the right to sell the land.

Forging Connections Among San People

15. (SBU) During closed sessions, Angolan San discussed with each other and their Southern African kinsmen key issues affecting their communities, such as hunger, conflicts between the Angolan San and their Bantu neighbors over land and water rights, and the lack of potable water, medical clinics, and schools. San kinsmen in neighboring countries were able to share their positive and negative experiences in obtaining land rights, social services, and community development while working to maintain San traditions, culture, and language. This was the first-ever gathering of Angolan San people from various provinces, and the first time that many Angolan San had ever seen a city. A San representative from Botswana told Poloff he was surprised by how "behind" the Angolan San community is in terms of health, standards of living, knowledge of their rights, and ability to dialogue on community issues and visualize a different future. He characterized the Angolan San community as living at the same standard their kinsmen in neighboring countries were at 20-30 years ago.

A History of Exclusion

16. (U) Background: An estimated 3,500 Angolan San live in small communities scattered throughout the southern provinces of Huila, Cunene, and Kuando Kubango. The San's historically nomadic lifestyle made it easy for both expanding Bantu tribes and Portuguese colonialists to exclude the San from the country's political and social structure. Though San communities settled into more fixed locations and adopted agricultural production before independence, their history of

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extreme poverty, discrimination and social exclusion continued through the civil war. Their history of communal decision making leaves them without traditional leaders who can address San issues with local Bantu chiefs (sobas) and local government officials. The government-run newspaper Jornal de Angola recently labeled the San as the "poorest of the poor, even in a country as poor as Angola." Note: Research in San communities found 39 percent child mortality rates, 99 percent illiteracy, and extremely high levels of food insecurity. End Note.

17. (U) The San people, sometimes called Khoison (which is the linguistic designation for a family of click languages) or Bushmen, are the indigenous people in parts of Angola, Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa. Genetic evidence suggests the San are one of the oldest peoples in the world. End background.

18. (SBU) Comment: Though the Provincial Governments were represented and a National Assembly deputy (also former Minister of Culture) attended the conference, firm commitments of government aid were not made. High-level government attendance was notably absent; the Governor of Huila was expected to open and close the conference, but sent representatives instead. While the verbal recognition of San rights shown by the GRA during the conference is a very positive step, the legwork to actually protect those rights will be done through the international community's support of local NGOs for the foreseeable future. End Comment.

FERNANDEZ